

VZCZCXRO7990
PP RUEHBI
DE RUEHLM #0740/01 2090924
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 280924Z JUL 09
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0284
INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 1803
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 8819
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 7058
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 5064
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3190
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 5021
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 1300
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0561
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4128
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 9411
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 6712
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO 1226
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3645
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000740

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INSB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/25/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [EAID](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: POST-WAR TAMIL LEADERSHIP VACUUM

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES JAMES R. MOORE. REASONS: 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Summary. Tamil National Alliance (TNA) member of parliament (MP) from Jaffna Pathmini Sithamparanathan met with Poloff on July 13 to discuss the TNA's current status and post-war strategy. She said the TNA had begun talking with other Tamil parties about how to unite the Tamil polity and move forward, but once local elections were announced for the Jaffna and Vavuniya municipal councils, the Tamil parties resumed their intense rivalry and dialogue has ended. Sithamparanathan said that following the end of the war, the responsibility of leading the Tamil people now fell to the TNA, but the TNA lacked credible leaders. Sithamparanathan disputed the conventional wisdom that the post-LTTE political landscape affords more space for moderate Tamil leadership. Now that the LTTE is gone, she said, the smaller Tamil parties are engaged in a power grab and Tamil politicians are exposed to more harassment by the government and government-backed paramilitary groups. Sithamparanathan said that many within the TNA are willing to talk with the government to help create political space for Tamil political parties to operate and to help build rapport with the administration. End Summary.

Political Soul-Searching Interrupted By Elections

¶2. (C) Tamil National Alliance (TNA) member of parliament (MP) from Jaffna Pathmini Sithamparanathan met with Poloff on July 13 to discuss the TNA's current status and post-war strategy. She said the TNA several weeks ago had begun the process of talking with Tamil parties, both inside and outside the alliance, about how to unite the Tamil polity and move forward in seeking redress for Tamil grievances. However, she said, once the Jaffna and Vavuniya municipal council elections were announced, the Tamil parties have resumed their intense rivalry and dialogue has ended. She said the TNA is unsure of how much support it has among the population because elections have not been held at the local level in many years. She noted that most of the candidates contesting were "weak" and explained that most politicians who would make good candidates were afraid to contest; in

2006, elections were announced in the north, but never held, and many who had registered as candidates were abducted or killed. She said candidates are experiencing some harassment during this campaign.

13. (C) TNA MP from Vavuniya Sivanathan Kishore told local press on July 26 that the TNA would hold talks with other Tamil parties on a political solution soon after the elections in Jaffna and Vavuniya on August 8. He said the TNA politburo had decided to negotiate with Tamil political party leaders to create a common platform to deal with the issue of political reconciliation. The TNA planned to meet with Douglas Devananda from the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), Dharmalingam Siddharthan from the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), V. Anandasangaree from the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and Chief Minister of Eastern Province Sivanesanathurai Chandrakanthan (Pillaiyan) of the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP), but would not meet with Minister of Nation Building Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan (Karuna) because he was a member of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP).

New Leaders Needed, But None on the Horizon

14. (C) Sithamparanathan said that following the end of the war, the Tamil population was facing a leadership crisis. The responsibility of leading the Tamil people now fell to the TNA, she said, but the TNA itself lacked credible leaders. She said the Tamil community would need time to

COLOMBO 00000740 002 OF 003

address the "cultural deterioration" that has occurred among Tamils during the war and that new leadership was unlikely to emerge until this happened.

15. (C) Sithamparanathan said that TNA leader R. Sampanthan has little credibility with Tamils and cannot unite the Tamil polity. She said he has a feudal mentality, is proud and stubborn, and will not listen to ideas or input from others in the party. She said there is growing dissatisfaction within the TNA with his leadership and his refusal to share power. Unfortunately, she said, the TNA lacks the institutional framework to select new people for key positions. She and other party members suggested a workshop to discuss internal TNA grievances, but their request was never acknowledged. Given the impasse, she said, some TNA leaders are talking of leaving to join the government. She described three tiers within the TNA: those at the very top who are oblivious to the internal problems, those at the bottom that want to join the government to gain power, and those in the middle that want to do "something real." She said that at this point it is hard to tell whether the TNA will remain intact, and if so, which group will prevail.

Civil Society Shares Pessimistic View

16. (C) The Executive Director of prominent local think tank Centre for Policy Alternatives, Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, told Poloff on July 14 that he too saw few promising leaders within the Tamil community. He noted that TNA members of parliament who had been backed by the LTTE would begin to shift toward the government because they would need political cover. The others, he said, would need to signal their distance from the LTTE and the government by devising their own proposals for devolution that do not focus on the LTTE-preferred Interim Self-Governing Authority or the GSL-preferred 13th Amendment and that acknowledge the necessity of a united Sri Lanka. He said that TULF leader Anandasangaree is a maverick whom no one takes seriously. PLOTE, he said, has been aligned with the government since 1987 and has only a small constituency in Vavuniya. He said that EPDP's Devananda has forged "Faustian bargains" with every government, including the current administration, because he is obligated to provide for his 600 or so cadre.

Saravanamuttu said that Devananda resisted joining the United Peoples Freedom Alliance ticket for the northern local elections as long as possible because he was reluctant to be seen as the government,s "northern Karuna." Devananda may be a thug, he said, but he is not a yes-man and does have some degree of political ideology. Saravanamuttu noted the difficulty of uniting the entire Tamil polity because of differences between northern, eastern, and hill Tamils. Making things even more difficult, he said, is the government,s "never again" strategy in the north, which he defined as a commitment to preventing any Tamil groups from gaining enough strength to challenge the state. In this environment, he noted, it will be difficult for new leaders to emerge.

Defeat of LTTE Does Not Equal Greater Political Space

17. (C) Sithamparanathan disputed the conventional wisdom that the post-LTTE political landscape affords more space for moderate Tamil leadership. Now that the LTTE is gone, she said, the smaller Tamil parties are engaged in a power grab. For example, she said, PLOTE has been conducting abductions for ransom to raise funds, which it plans to use to influence the upcoming election. She said PLOTE and other parties "use the money to get power and then use the power to get more money." She said people in her constituency have reported being forced to give money to multiple parties. She added

COLOMBO 00000740 003 OF 003

that without the LTTE, Tamil politicians are exposed to more harassment by the government and government-backed paramilitary groups, such as the EPDP. The government will not allow new, viable Tamil leadership to emerge, she said. A separate TNA contact has reported that the government intelligence services are creating a climate of fear and paranoia among TNA MPs, who fear detention and prevention of travel.

Some Willing to Engage with Government

18. (C) Sithamparanathan said that many within the TNA are willing to talk with the government to help create political space for Tamil political parties to operate and to help build rapport with the administration. She said Tamil parties need the space to create a Tamil coalition to contest upcoming general elections. She observed that President Rajapaksa is likely to be around for quite some time and that Tamil parties will have to figure out how to work with him. She admitted, however, that some within the TNA remained unwilling to engage the government at all.

19. (C) COMMENT: The TNA seems to be struggling with how to define itself in the post-war era. However, given the LTTE,s strategy over the years of eliminating its competition, there are not many other options for Tamil political leadership within the opposition. Sithamparanathan,s comments suggested that the TNA is resigned to the fact that Devananda and the SLFP will be difficult to compete against in the northern local elections because of their ability to deliver goods and services to the people. This somewhat pessimistic attitude, coupled with significant divisions within the TNA leadership, does not bode well for the TNA,s chances to emerge as a strong Tamil political voice. In spite of their position as the Tamil party with by far the most elected MPs, the TNA's ability to provide any sort of constructive opposition role or to develop much power to help shape policy will likely be limited for some time to come.

MOORE